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is it heaven or las vegas, is it where the story ends, or is it.....

CULTURE CRINGE

FANZINE SERIES!

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CHEAP

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FANZINE DEDICATED TO TWO OF MY FAVE BANDS:

COCTEAU TWINS

AND

THE SUNDAYS

Includes interview with Simon Raymonde of Cocteau Twins!!!

welcome to this (once again) **SPECIAL EDITION** of **culture** ~~cronge~~ **cringe**!! yes, it seems like nearly every issue these days bears the title of "special edition"....why is that? well in my mind, I guess I only consider the four seasonal issues as REAL issues, but I guess I need to change that? or I might just put SPECIAL EDITION on every single issue from here on out. **who cares!**

THIS issue was a fun one to make - i really DO like making fanzines about stuff I like. I REALLY DO! I say that in the same enthusiastic way that Britney Spears said "I REALLY DO LIKE PEPSI" in that 2003 CNN interview. (sigh, anyways). As you already know, this issue is dedicated to Cocteau Twins and The Sundays, two bands that I hold up on high. No tricks, but there is a treat: I got to INTERVIEW Cocteau Twin member Simon Raymonde! I could not believe it either. He was super cool and nice to answer my questions, and it's one of the coolest things I've ever done. We will get to that shortly. Oh, I hope you are wearing your reading glasses, unless you don't need them of course. And just so you know, I'm not one dimensional in my music tastes...for example I'm listening to the latest Blondshell album as I type this. And yesterday I started watching that new documentary on Billy Joel that's on HBO. Just sayin. Ok let's get this started.

**********HEAD OVER HEELS IN A BLUE BELL KNOLL**********

I remember hearing **Cocteau Twins** on a local (to me) college radio station in the mid-90s, that's when I think I first heard them. The station was out of Vol State University - 88.5 FM. They would tend to play certain songs over and over. Some of the other memorable songs that I heard all the time on that station include **Is It Like Today** by **World Party** and **There She Goes** by **The La's**. Pretty cool and progressive for small town Tennessee if I say so myself. Anyways the song I heard by the Cocteau's was **Summerhead**, which is off of their album **Four Calendar Cafe**. I always liked it....a lot.....but I didn't buy any of their albums until a few years later when I was in college. The honor of my first Cocteau Twins purchase goes to the compilation album **Stars and Topsoil**. I actually bought it hoping that Summerhead would be on it - at the time I didn't know the actual NAME of the song, I just knew it's infectious melody. Well of course, I didn't hear it cos it wasn't on there, but it didn't matter! That's when I discovered the full wonderful world of the music of Cocteau Twins, and I was blown away - also bummed that I hadn't gotten way into them sooner. I was HOOKED. Second purchase? Yep you know it - **Heaven or Las Vegas**. Over the next little bit I tracked down every other album I could find, yet the band itself still seemed so MYSTERIOUS to me. There just wasn't a ton of information out there about them. Were they broken up? Would they be putting out more music? I had no idea. Regardless, it's always so fun when you personally discover a band with a large back catalogue that in you opinion is pretty flawless.

**********THE PINK OPAQUE'S TREASURE**********

The Cocteau Twins consist of 3 (three) primary members: **Elizabeth Fraser** (vox), **Robin Guthrie** (guitars, etc), and **Simon Raymonde** (bass). I'm not going to give a rundown of the history of the band, that's your job to seek out. You can stop reading now if you don't already have a fair knowledge of them, go read about them on *wikipedia* or something, and then come back here when you're ready.....ok cool. Let's move on. If you'd like a really good insight into the band I HIGHLY recommend the new book from Simon called **In One Ear**. It's one of the better music autobiographies I've read in a *LONG* time. Honestly, I actually recommend the audio version if you're down with those. He reads it himself and it's an excellent listen. Seriously, check it out if you're a fan of the band or just a music fan in general.

**********THE MOON AND THE MELODIES**********

I think I've made it pretty clear in these zines in the past that I'm not a lyric guy. I know I talked about it in my Aimee Mann fanzine. For better or worse, I just don't really care about lyrics. To me, they are just noises - like another instrument. That's the way I hear them. I very rarely know what anyone is saying. They could be singing the phone book for all I care - but if the melody is cool and the voice sounds nice, I'M IN. Treating the vocals as just another instrument works out incredibly well with Cocteau Twins. Because....as you probably know, even if I WANTED to know what Elizabeth Fraser was saying I'd be pretty out of luck. Pretty safe to say that hardly anyone knows what she's saying other than a few phrases here and there, and i LOVE that. I tend to feel left out when I'm hanging out with people and everyone is singing along to the music while I'm... ya know, just hearing noises. Ok, lets explore this wonderful voice of Elizabeth Fraser a little more....could it possibly be the most ethereal, otherworldly voice of all time? I say YES and one thing is for sure: it can't be duplicated. Who would want to try? IMPOSSIBLE TASK. As far as the "voice as an instrument" aspect goes, I'd say that her voice is one of my favorite instrument sounds of all time. And I am so glad that I can't even understand what most of the words are - it's perfect that way sometimes.

**********MILK AND KISSES AND GARLANDS AND WISHES**********

Did Cocteau Twins invent dream pop? I don't think that the term was originally used by anyone in describing their music particularly, but i think they are THE perfect example of true dream pop. Their music provokes a transcendental feeling at times, feels other worldly, and focuses on the feeling rather than the message. That's what dream pop is to me. That term gets thrown around pretty liberally these days, as does shoegaze. Honestly as far as I'm concerned, **Enya** is more dream pop than most modern day self labeled groups are. Full disclosure: I like Enya....a lot. Some people label **My Bloody Valentine** as dream pop and that just doesn't work for me. They are much too aggressive for that label in my opinion. **Slowdive** fits the bill, as does very early **Lush** - and of course the modern champs of the genre have to be **Beach House**. I'm not sure why I even included this section, but here we are. OH YEAH I think the purpose was to say that the Cocteau's, in my opinion, are the originators of what most modern day music fans consider dream pop. **Yeah, that's it. That's what I meant.**

*********ECHOES IN A SHALLOW BAY WITH A FOUR CALENDAR CAFE*********

Robin Guthrie, besides being the driving force behind the Cocteau Twin's sound, also produced some pretty rad stuff with other bands. He produced the early Lush stuff, which I love of course - including their debut full length Spooky. One cool thing that happened last year: i went to see The Chameleons play and they had an opening band called The Veldt. I had never heard of them, but noticed they were older guys when they took the stage. I was blown away by how cool they sounded - they were one of the better opening act surprises I've ever had. After the show, I learned that they have been putting out music since the early 90s and were from North Carolina. They had an album that they recorded in 1989 called Illuminated that never got released....and it was produced by Robin Guthrie! Elizabeth Fraser sang on a track too.....WHAT?? How cool is that! So in 2024, they finally got the rights to reissue it (or issue it, since it never had seen the light of day.) I of course picked up a copy and it's really good, you can definitely hear the Guthrie influence. I suggest checking them out - they are still touring a lot and hopefully they'll come back to town soon. Just thought I'd share all that hahaha

**********HEAVEN OR TINY DYNAMITE**********

There just isn't a ***ton*** of live footage of the Cocteau Twins out there, which is pretty crazy. Back when I first got into them really hardcore back in the early 00's, there wasn't any available anywhere on youtube and stuff. I don't think it was until around 2010 that I finally saw live footage of the band - I HAD seen music videos though. I think it's such a shame that they didn't get to release a live concert film like nearly every band in the 80s-90s seemed to have (at least one of). It was the golden era of concert films....so much good stuff. **The Cure** had **In Orange**, **Depeche Mode** had **101**, **Siouxsie** had **Nocturne**, **Morrissey Live In Dallas**....GAH so much good stuff. I could watch those all day everyday. I wish there was a Cocteau one in there. Maybe the band just didn't want to do that - I can totally see that. But they were *soooo* good live. There are some random recordings out there, seek it out. Actually I HIGHLY recommend their **BBC Sessions** release. It's not available on streaming I don't think - but the CDs are very affordable. It has some of my favorite Cocteau recordings on it PERIOD. It's composed of recordings from 1982 all the way to '96. The versions of **Fifty Fifty Clown** and **Seekers Who Are Lovers** are two of my all time faves. Simply amazing!

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CC: When Cocteau Twins were in the studio, were you (for lack a better term) a "gear head" with your equipment? With such amazing tones and sounds on the recordings you played on, I'm curious as to how much time and effort you typically put into your bass sound before hitting the record button!

Simon: We weren't initially able to be due to lack of funds, and only had a few pedals but once we had our own studio (*Blue Bell Knoll* onwards) everything changed. Robin was the driving force behind the actual outboard gear we purchased as that was his passion and his domain, but experimentation in the studio with "sound" was the key to landing on a specific tone or sound, though it wasn't overblown or too considered, more along the lines of "Let's plug this into there and see what happens!" Then a bit of fiddling and we'd be off and running. We didn't want to lose the vibe so we worked very quickly. Things naturally took longer the deeper we were in our career but that's to be expected with kids and other *life* stuff getting in the way.

CC: Two of my favorite releases so far this year are both on your label, Bella Union: Anxious by Nell Smith and Tripla by Miki Berenyi Trio. Basically I have always trusted everything your label releases! Is it safe to say that by navigating the music business first as a musician, you knew exactly how you wanted to run things as a label and artist manager from the start? Or was there a major learning curve involved?

Simon: Honestly I have no clue what I'm doing and that's probably the secret. I do everything by feel and instinct. It's like choosing a girl to date or falling in love. You're gonna get it wrong loads. So my attitude has always been, follow your heart, do what feels right, be honest and if it doesn't work out, learn from your mistakes and try again!

CC: BONUS QUESTION! I remember seeing a band that you're very familiar with - Dirty Three - open for Beck in 1996. I had no idea who they were but their music really blew my mind! Can you tell me of an instance where you had your mind unexpectedly blown by an opening act that you previously weren't aware of?

Simon: There was a period in the punk days that I used to see **Subway Sect** more than any other band but not because I went purposefully to watch them, they were just always the support band! So I became a big fan almost by mistake, but probably the best was seeing **The Associates** supporting **The Cure** in December 1979 at the Music Machine in London. Unforgettable and lead to a deep love of the band and **Billy Mackenzie** in particular. I co-produced his posthumous lp **Beyond The Sun**.

*******************thanks so much to simon raymonde for taking time to answer these questions!*******************

PART TWO: ELECTRIC BOOGALOO. THE SUNDAYS

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My fandom of The Sundays goes pretty far back. 1993 to be exact. I remember vividly getting the CD of their album Blind in the mail as part of one of those "get 12 CDs for a penny" deals that Columbia House did. And just like everyone else, I probably still owe Columbia House money cos I really don't think I ever bought three albums at "regular club price" over the next year. I mean, it was their fault - they were sending that stuff out to anyone who could sign their name and tape a penny to a postcard. They knew what they were getting into. ~~AYNWAYS~~ ANYWAYS before I got that album, I really only knew of their cover of Wild Horses - which was played pretty often on Thunder 94 FM back then. I also knew Here's Where The Story Ends from their first album. But that's it! SO when I got Blind in the mail and put it on I was pretty blown away. Of all the 12 CDs that I had gotten for my hard earned penny, this one got the most playtime....as in every day. I became obsessed. Imagine that. I quickly got one of my friends (who could drive) to take me to the mall to find their first CD - Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. FOUND IT. I had discovered my new favorite band, who just like all bands back then were shrouded in mystery. This was in the era where you seriously didn't even know what bands looked like. They weren't really featured much in music magazines and I could never catch any of their videos on 120 Minutes on MTV or anything. Finally I found an article about them in (I think) Spin magazine. Whoa - they looked so cool! I cut that picture out and pinned it up on my wall. Yes, i had the classic 90s collage wall made up of band pics and the like.

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When i went to college, i quickly formed my first band. I put up flyers around campus seeking people to play with - you know those flyers with the phone numbers on the bottom where you can tear one off? Yeah i did that - which was super fun because i could walk by every day or so and see if any numbers had been taken. WELL, when you put up a flyer for potential bandmates, you gotta put influences. The Sundays were at the top of the list. and pretty soon i got a call from Sarah, who expressed that The Sundays were one of her favorite bands. i am pretty sure that without even hearing each other play or sing, we both knew that we had to form a band. turns out Sarah could sing REALLY well, and she liked my guitar playing! things work out sometimes. The first thing we recorded was an acoustic cover of Here's Where the Story Ends, and it sounded awesome. we started writing songs and we wrote some really good ones. My issue, that i realize now, was that i was trying to hard to write on the same level as David Gavurin....which wasn't really realistic for an 18 year old guy in his first real band. BUT we did write some bangers and did well - had some amazing shows and got to play some really cool venues....including the legendary 328 Performance Hall! We got to play there the night after World Party had played there - which was surreal. their setlists were still all over the stage (of course I grabbed them) and guitar picks were scattered (i grabbed those as well). For years, anytime I played guitar I used one of my "world party" picks.

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I remember the excitement in 1997 when The Sundays finally announced their next album, Static and Silence. Everyone in my friend group was buzzing! We all went to buy it on release day and it goes without saying that the lead off track Summertime was the summer jam that year. And they finally had a video on regular rotation on MTV and VH1! That video was on allllllll the time. It's a really pretty video. Harriet looks so cool. Also I noticed how David swayed while playing guitar - OK I guess I'm gonna do that now. I just HAD to emulate my guitar hero. I was also stoked that he was playing a Telecaster guitar in it - WELL THAT'S WHAT I PLAYED! Perfect. THEN. They announced a tour. No Nashville of course. OF COURSE. But they're playing Atlanta.....hmmmmmm. Yeah, me and Sarah got tickets. No brainer of the year right there!

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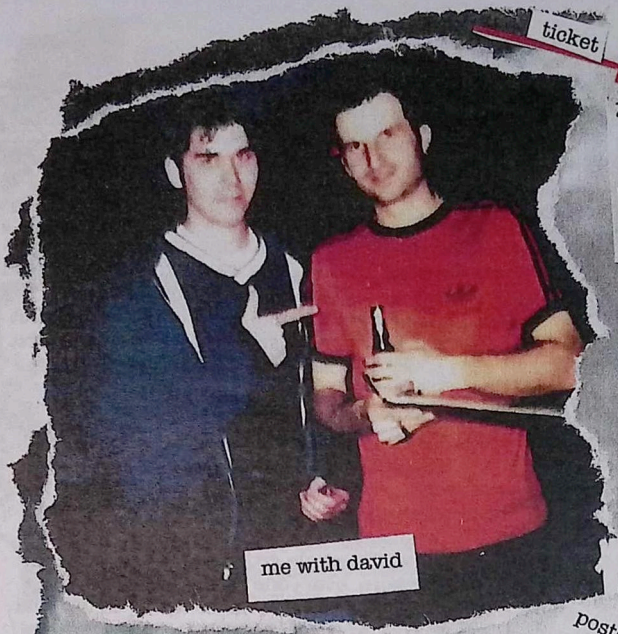
the sundays played in atlanta in november of 97, and we made the trip. i don't remember who's car we took, but either way i'm sure it was on the edge of breaking down. we didn't think about stuff back then. no cell phones, no gps, and a car that could break down at any minute? **yeah, let's take off to atlanta**. why not? well, the show was incredible. **garrison starr** opened and she was great too. but the sundays.....whoa. it was so crazy seeing them finally. we were pretty close to the front. i remember they opened with "can't be sure", which was so cool because of how the song builds up the way it does. they played everything i wanted to hear. after the show, we went to the car and sat for a minute. should we start heading back to murfreesboro.....or hang around for a bit and try to meet the band? hmmmmm. looking back, i think that i was more hesitant to the idea. i think it was sarah who pushed for it. ok, let's give it a shot! we walked back to the venue and found the stage door where around 10 people were hanging out. it was a small group of fans who had the same idea. we met them, all super cool people. one girl told us that bands always come out and meet people at that door, and they had done the exact same thing when **the smiths** played there ten years prior. things started getting exciting about the idea of meeting the band. finally, the door opened....but it wasn't the band. it was someone who worked for them, a nice british guy with a smile. "come on in" he said while opening the door wide. he said the band would be right out. whoa! we were back in the venue, gathered by the stage. then here they came, the whole group. amazing! it was such a small, intimate "meet and greet" that's for sure. everyone got to chat with everyone in the band, they were so cool. i ended up talking to david for a long time. i told him about OUR band, and how we covered their song when we first recorded. david was like, "i'd love to hear that!" i wish i could've played it for him. we talked about guitars, and he asked me if i had ever played a **gibson s.g.** guitar. i said no, so he jumped up on stage and grabbed his - and let me try it out for a minute. wow!! harriet was very kind of course, as was the rest of the band. all i had on me for them to sign was a piece of notebook paper - which i ran back to the car to retrieve. i think it was from a notebook with school notes or something. i got them all to sign it, then got my picture taken with david. sarah got her picture taken with harriet. david was drinking a beer and when he was done i took the empty bottle. held on to that for years - i know, it's weird. finally, after talking and hanging out for nearly an hour, harriet said (in her sleepy, english accent) "david.....it's so late, i'm tired!" david said something about how he was having fun and was in "talking mode".....but got the hint that they should head back. i think they had their toddler children with them on tour. we started making our way back to murfreesboro, buzzing with excitement. but around 3 am, that buzz wore off and the drive back got scary. i was so happy when we made it home. we were exhausted.

The crazy thing about meeting the band is that it was after their last-ever show in the U.S. Well, at the time, no one knew that. We thought they'd put out another album in a year or so and tour again. We thought we'd see them again. Nope. That was it. They returned to the UK and played one more hometown show the next week, and that was it. No big announcement or break up, just silence. For years everyone was wondering when they'd release something new - it just never happened. They just vanished! Nearly 30 years later they are still as much of a mystery as then. They have yet to publicly resurface or release anything new. It's actually kind of awesome that they did it this way - release three amazing albums and go out on top. People constantly rant online now about how they need to do a reunion tour or something. I am not so sure. I think their legacy is flawless, and I think they did it just right. Either way, it remains pretty wild to me that we got to spend some good time with them after their last U.S. show. I think that David and Harriet knew that was it for them, and they were soaking it up. It remains one of the coolest nights of my life, that's for sure - and I'll always be thankful to them for spending time hanging out with us.



me with david

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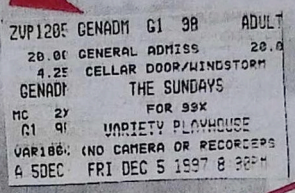
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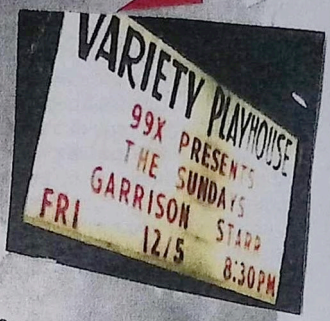

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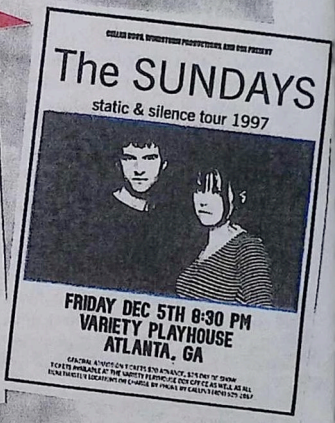

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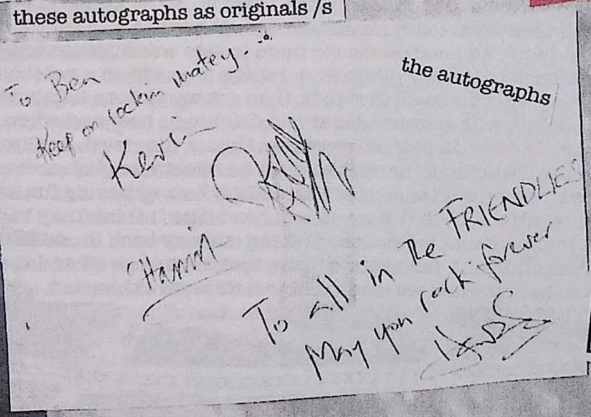

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